

# ICPS newsletter<sup>®</sup>

## Politics in Ukraine: 8 months to the presidential election

*The International Center for Policy Studies continues to analyze the political situation in Ukraine through its "Political Commentary" monthly. The latest issue, reviewing events that took place during February 2004, is now in print. We offer our newsletter readers a snapshot of political life in Ukraine, including domestic and foreign relations, government policy, the economy, and public opinion, eight months before the October election*

### Foreign Relations

Russia is refusing to accept Ukraine's decision to use the Odesa-Brody pipeline to transport Caspian rather than Russian petroleum. At the same time, Ukraine's eastern neighbor has tied the ratification of a key accord settling boundaries, important to Ukraine, to an agreement setting up the Common Economic Area (CEA), through which Moscow is hoping to draw Kyiv closer to itself. This has raised concerns in the US, which is no longer prepared to accept Russian hegemony on the territory of the former Soviet Union. The EU is inclined to take the same position, accepting a proposal by Ukraine to prepare a full Plan of Action that would facilitate eventual integration into the Union. But the upcoming presidential election remains a threat to Ukrainian relations with the West, which is using this event as a measure of democratic prospects in the country.

### Political Competition

Under pressure from western countries, the ruling centrist coalition decided to drop the idea of having the Ukrainian president elected by the Verkhovna Rada, which it had hoped to use as a lever for retaining control after the fall election. This gave the coalition additional support from the leftist opposition, which is now prepared to vote in favor of Constitutional changes that will considerably constrict the powers of future presidents. Relations between rightist and leftist opposition groups grew even worse, which plays into the hands of the coalition that is hoping to hang on to power until the 2006 VR

elections. At the same time, the weakening of presidential powers reduces the risk of the 2004 election turning into an all-out war.

### Government Policy

Ukraine succeeded in being removed from FATF's blacklist and negotiated WTO accession with three more countries. The Defense Minister proposed speeding up the reduction of Ukraine's Armed Forces, while the president issued a decree calling for the removal of security service agents from government positions. He also made a decision to increase student stipends. The parliament passed a law reducing the VAT and confirming a slew of breaks to car-makers. Economic growth steamed along, reaching record heights. Prices grew at a middling pace, the hryvnia rate remained stable against the dollar, and the Budget collected all planned revenues.

### Public Opinion

This may be one of the contributing factors behind a slight improvement in attitudes towards government institutions and some coalition politicians, although public opinion generally remained openly negative. Among potential candidates for the presidency, Viktor Yushchenko maintained the lead. Still, the fact that he lacks a substantial base of support in Eastern Ukraine continues to make it hard to predict the results of the election. ■

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*Table 1. Trends in trust in political leaders, January–February 2004 (balance of trust-distrust), %*

Political leader	January 2004	February 2004
Viktor Yushchenko	-11	-13
Viktor Yanukovych	-30	-24
Serhiy Tihipko	-23	-26
Volodymyr Lytvyn	-30	-32
Oleksandr Moroz	-25	-32
Petro Symonenko	-31	-36
Yevhen Marchuk	-39	-38
Leonid Kuchma	-43	-41
Viktor Medvedchuk	-50	-46
Yulia Tymoshenko	-34	-46

*Table 2. How Ukrainians would vote if the election were held next Sunday (relative to the day of the poll), %*

Probable candidate	January 2004	February 2004
Viktor Yushchenko	24	24
Leonid Kuchma	–	13
Petro Symonenko	10	10
Viktor Yanukovych	10	7
Oleksandr Moroz	5	5
Yulia Tymoshenko	6	4
Georgiy Kyrpa	4	4
Natalia Vitrenko	3	3
Serhiy Tihipko	2	2
Viktor Medvedchuk	2	1
Volodymyr Lytvyn	1	1
Others	4	1
Against everyone	7	5
Would not vote	6	5
Undecided	16	15

Source: Democratic Initiatives Foundation

**icps newsletter** is a weekly publication of the International Centre for Policy Studies (ICPS), delivered by electronic mail. To be included in the distribution list, mail your request to: [marketing@icps.kiev.ua](mailto:marketing@icps.kiev.ua).

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ICPS is an independent research organisation whose mandate is to promote the introduction of public policy concepts and practices in Ukraine. This is achieved by increasing the know-how of key government officials for policy choices, formulation and debate, and the awareness of the public-at-large of the benefits of policy. Address: 13a Pymonenka Street, Kyiv 04050, Ukraine. Phone: +380-44-236-4477. Web-site: <http://www.icps.kiev.ua/>